



# REDLANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

December 10, 2018

Dear Redlands USD families, staff and community:

As you may already be aware, the Redlands Unified School District has reached a settlement related to the victims of former Redlands High School Teacher, Joel Koonce. First and foremost, we sincerely hope that in reaching this resolution, it will allow healing for the victims and their families. Our deepest sympathies, thoughts and prayers continue to pour out to them.

### **Why was a settlement reached in the Koonce case?**

It is important for our community to understand that this resolution does not represent an admission of wrongdoing by RUSD in its handling of this matter. In fact, it was the timely and repeated reporting by District employees that helped Redlands Police Department eventually arrest Koonce. After the numerous reports filed by our employees and attempts to substantiate those allegations, new evidence finally surfaced in October of 2018; nearly a year after he had been released from employment with the District.

The District owes it to the community at large, and to all of our students, as beneficiaries of the RUSD educational experience, to be prudent financial stewards of tax dollars. The risk and uncertainty of a jury trial could have resulted in even further loss of valuable resources and negatively impacted all of our students.

### **In this case, our reporting system worked**

Within a matter of weeks into my administration as Superintendent of the Redlands Unified School District, I was made aware that a Child Protective Services (CPS) report was submitted by one of our employees against Koonce. I subsequently directed our Human Resources Department to place Koonce on administrative leave. The Redlands Police Department, immediately conducted a thorough investigation but was unable to substantiate any allegations of misconduct. Nonetheless, a very short time after the police completed their initial investigation, we successfully separated Koonce from employment with RUSD and we notified the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC).

Over the next year, well after his employment, we continued to report suspicions related to Koonce to CPS and the Redlands Police Department. In fact, three additional CPS reports were filed by Redlands Unified School District employees in accordance with the State mandated reporter law. The Redlands Police Department launched subsequent investigations with each

report; but were ultimately unable to substantiate any of the allegations until the fourth report was submitted. We would like to thank the Redlands Police Department for their diligence and attentiveness throughout this ordeal.

### **Setting the record straight**

It has been extremely disheartening to see adults, who have been entrusted to watch over our students, fail to honor their sacred promise to keep students safe and willfully and consciously violate the law. The District strongly condemns the cowardly and despicable predatory acts perpetrated by Koonce and the other deplorable individuals who have preceded him. However, we remain hopeful in our dedicated employees who have and will continue to meet the responsibilities of their profession, including reporting suspicions to the proper authorities. As demonstrated by the facts of the Koonce case, we will continue to act swiftly and move to terminate any individual who violates our standards and policies.

It is crucial that I take the time to address the doubts that have been cast upon the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources – Sabine Robertson-Phillips. The majority of news reports have continued to reference baseless and unsubstantiated allegations. A press release from the District Attorney himself unequivocally exonerated her of any wrongdoing. No RUSD administrator has been charged with misconduct in the handling of any sex abuse complaint. No allegations of administrator negligence, as reported by the news media, have ever been substantiated in a court of law.

### **Actions Create Trust (ACT)**

Upon accepting the Office of Superintendent of the Redlands Unified School District, I was aware of the challenges that awaited me and the District. Working with the Board of Education Trustees, we made a joint commitment to understand the lessons learned from these cases and take every action possible to avoid such horrible actions from taking place in the future. We have invested many hours in identifying the vulnerabilities in our school system in order to strengthen our policies, protocols and systems to enhance student safety.

As part of the multiyear vision titled RUSD 2025 Excellence for All Students, learning in safe and secure environments is a strong focus. We have now developed the **ACT (Actions Create Trust) Now** District-wide initiative. The ACT Now program includes ten comprehensive actions that are now in place to enhance student safety and increase the awareness and capacity of our employees. The ACT Now initiative contains four major components: Prevention, Precautions, Practices and Punishments.

The goals of ACT Now are to:

1. Identify and intervene when initial grooming behavior is suspected, professional boundaries are crossed, or student/employee conduct is in violation of our more stringent standards.
2. Provide the awareness, training, procedures, and sensitivity to prevent and deal with threats to student safety and well-being.

We consider ACT Now to be our Doppler Radar System to detect the potential for sexual abuse or harassment and to intervene before threats escalate. ACT Now has allowed us to build our own capacity to intervene sooner with discipline, increasing sanctions, and ultimately dismissal with follow-ups to CTC and law enforcement.

Action steps include:

1. Implementation of a new ***Adult & Student Boundary*** Policy that clearly defines appropriate and inappropriate conduct (Please See Attached).
2. The creation of a uniform ***See/Hear/Sense Something – Say Something*** Poster which includes all pertinent contact information and process on how to place mandated reports in order to empower all of our employees to report when necessary (Please See Attached).
3. Providing training in August of 2018, from author Diane Cranley, author of 8 Ways to Decide their Fate, to enhance our staff's ability to identify "***child grooming***" behaviors by adults, topics that are not taught in a teacher preparation program.
4. The implementation of the ***Raptor System*** for all of our schools to ensure that anyone who enters any campus in our District is not a convicted sex offender.
5. Working in conjunction with our law enforcement agencies. ***School Resource Officers*** are now stationed at each one of our comprehensive high schools in order to provide our employees and students easy and immediate access to a law enforcement agent.
6. Each employee, upon being hired to the District receives a copy of the ***Mandated Reporting Handbook***. Employees are given a copy of the book each year and the content of the handbook is reviewed each year.
7. Each employee, upon hire and every year they remain employed in the District, is given a copy of the ***Tips for Working Smarter*** document, that reinforces (at a quick glance) the appropriate and inappropriate behaviors outlined in the Adult and Student Boundary Policy.
8. Beginning in the 2018-19 School Year, the District directed all schools to implement a "***single point of entry***" for members of the public in order to create a safe perimeter around each school and properly screen anyone who enters a campus. Beginning in the 2018-19 School Year, the District directed all schools to implement "***supervised points of entry and exit***" for students before and after school. The goal is to enhance the number of employees supervising students before and after school and control who accesses our campus.
9. Each school has been directed to form a ***Safety Committee*** made up of Staff, Parents and Students. The purpose of the Committee is to invite and engage the school community in being a partner in enhancing all aspects of safety and awareness at each school site.

10. Additional **School Counselors** were hired to focus on the socio-emotional health of our students. The goal is to provide students a trusted adult on campus who can assist them with any challenges, fear or doubt they are experiencing and provide the appropriate support either within our school system or outside of the District.

The training provided to our employees and the focus on mandated reporting is already making a difference. As mentioned earlier, a total of four CPS reports were submitted by RUSD employees between October 2017 and October 2018 related to Koonce. In the Spring of 2018, the District initiated and successfully terminated two employees who had violated the Adult and Student boundary expectations. These cases came forth because District employees promptly and swiftly submitted reports to the proper authorities, as they are mandated to do.

**Student safety is a shared responsibility**

The Redlands Unified School District is working diligently to enhance the safety of students by constantly reviewing and improving our policies, protocols and practices. As your Superintendent, I am determined to continue to work with our team so that we can take decisive and appropriate action against any adult who violates the Adult to Student boundaries or inflicts harm upon our students.

As a valued member and stakeholder in this District, I want to thank you for your understanding and your continued support. We must work together and ACT Now to keep students and staff safe.

Respectfully,



Mauricio Arellano  
Superintendent of Schools

# Redlands USD

## Board Policy

### All Personnel – Professional Adult/Student Boundaries

BP 4019.1

#### Personnel

##### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide all staff, students, volunteers and community members with information to increase their awareness of their role in protecting children from inappropriate conduct and failure to maintain appropriate boundaries by adults. All adults are expected to maintain professional, moral and ethical relationships with students that are conducive to an effective, safe learning environment. The provisions of this policy apply to all District staff, volunteers and community members relative to their conduct with students (“employees”) in District schools and programs.

This policy addresses a range of behaviors that include not only obviously unlawful or improper interactions with students, but also boundary-blurring and grooming behaviors that undermine the professional adult/student relationship and can lead to misconduct or the appearance of impropriety.

##### General Standards

The Governing Board expects adults to maintain the highest professional, moral and ethical standards in their interaction with students. Employees are required to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, through consistently and appropriately applied discipline and establishing and maintaining professional boundaries.

The interactions and relationships between employees and students should be based upon mutual respect and trust, and an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students in and outside of the educational setting. Relationships between adults and students should also be consistent with the educational mission of the schools.

Employees will not intrude on a student’s physical and emotional boundaries unless the intrusion is necessary to serve a legitimate educational purpose. For purposes of this policy, the term “legitimate educational purpose” includes matters or communications related to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, treatment of a student’s injury or other medical needs, school administration, or other purposes within the scope of the adult’s employment duties.

##### Appearances of Impropriety

Employees are expected to be aware of the appearance of impropriety in their own conduct and the conduct of other adults when interacting with students.

Even though the intent of the employee may be professional and there is a legitimate education purpose for the conduct, the following activities can create the appearance of impropriety:

1. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
2. Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the employee’s home;

3. Remaining on campus with student(s) after the last administrator leaves the school site; and/or
4. Visiting a student's home unless home visits are a required and expected duty of the adult.

Whenever possible, employees should avoid these situations. If unavoidable, these activities should be pre-approved by the appropriate administrator. If not pre-approved, the employee must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

#### Electronic Communications

As with other forms of communication, when communicating electronically, employees shall maintain professional boundaries with students.

Electronic and other communications with students shall be for legitimate educational purposes only. Employees shall not maintain personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, letter, electronic communication, or other means (beyond legitimate educational purposes) without including the parent/guardian and/or school principal.

When available, District email and District communication devices shall be used when communicating electronically with students. The use of District email or other District communication devices shall be in accordance with District policies and procedures.

Employees shall not communicate with students, for any reason, through use of a medium that is designed to eliminate all traces or records of the communication (e.g. "Snapchat").

All electronic communications from coaches and advisors to team or club members shall concern only legitimate educational interests and shall be sent in a single communication to all participating team or club members, except for communications concerning an individual student's medical or academic privacy matters, in which case the communication will be copied to the school principal.

Employees shall not follow or accept requests from current students or non-adult former students to be friends or connections on personal social networking sites and shall not create or participate in any networking site for communication with students other than those provided by the District for this purpose, without the prior written approval of the school principal.

#### Boundary Violations

A boundary violation is an act or omission by an employee that does not have a legitimate educational purpose and has the potential to abuse the employee/student relationship. Examples of employee conduct that violate professional adult/student boundaries include but are not limited to the following:

1. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff-student relationship.
2. For non-guidance/counseling staff, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships.

If a student initiates such discussions, employees are expected to refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff. In either case, employee involvement should be limited to a direct connection to the student's school performance.

3. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names or otherwise in an overly familiar manner.
4. Maintaining personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, e-mail, instant messenger or Internet chat rooms, social networking websites, such as Facebook, or letters beyond homework or other legitimate school business without including the parent/guardian.

This prohibition specifically includes "friending" or "following" students on social media unless the social media page is dedicated to legitimate school business. This also specifically includes the posting of student images or other personally identifiable information of students on an adult's personal website.

5. Exchanging personal gifts, cards or letters with an individual student for which it is directly or implicitly suggested that a student is to say or do something in return.
6. Touching students or initiating inappropriate physical contact without a legitimate educational purpose.

Legitimate purposes could include the following: (a) Assisting an injured student; (b) assisting a student with special needs who requires assistance with toileting or other physical assistance; (c) appropriate coaching instruction; (d) appropriate music instruction; or (e) to protect the safety of students or staff.

7. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals or movies, shopping, traveling and recreational activities and visiting the student's home) outside of school-sponsored events, except as participants in organized community activities.
8. Transporting student(s) in a personal vehicle in a non-emergency situation and without proper written authorization forms in advance.
9. Being alone with a student without a legitimate educational purpose.

#### Boundary Violations Constituting Serious Misconduct

A boundary violation that constitutes serious misconduct is an act, omission, or pattern of such behavior by an adult that does not have a legitimate educational purpose; and results in abuse of the staff/student professional relationship.

##### A. Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Employees are prohibited from dating, courting, or entering into or attempting to form a romantic or sexual relationship with any student, regardless of the student's age.

Prohibited romantic or sexual interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sexual physical contact;

2. Romantic flirtation, propositions, or sexual remarks;
3. Sexual slurs, leering, epithets, sexual or derogatory comments;
4. Personal comments about a student's body;
5. Sexual jokes, banter, innuendo, notes, stories, drawings, gestures or pictures;
6. Spreading sexual or romantic rumors;
7. Touching a student's body or clothes in a sexual or intimate way or in a manner that is not age appropriate;
8. Restricting a student's freedom of movement in a sexually intimidating or provocative manner;
9. Displaying or transmitting sexual objects, pornography, pictures, or depictions to a student; or
10. Any type of conduct that would be considered harassment under Board Policy.

**B. Social and Other Interactions**

Employees are prohibited from engaging in social and other interactions with students which abuse the student/staff professional relationship.

Prohibited social and other interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sending or accompanying students on personal errands unrelated to any legitimate educational purpose;
2. Furnishing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to a student, or being present where any student is consuming these substances;
3. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
4. Sharing personal secrets with a student;
5. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy (e.g. walking in on the student in the bathroom);
6. Taking a student out of class without a legitimate educational purpose;
7. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation without prior notification to and/or approval from the school principal as described above;
8. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory conduct prohibited by other District policies or by State or Federal law and regulations; or

9. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy.

Exceptions

An emergency situation or a legitimate educational purpose may justify deviation from professional boundaries set out in this policy. The employee shall be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that s/he has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

Under no circumstance will an educational or other reason justify deviation from the "Romantic and Sexual Relationship" section of this policy.

There may be circumstances where there is an appropriate pre-existing personal relationship between an employee and a student's family that exists independently of the employee's position with the District (e.g. when their children are friends). This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships. Employees are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity.

It is understood that adults may be involved in other roles in the community through civic, religious, athletic, scouting or other organizations and programs whose participants may include District students. This policy is not intended to interfere with or restrict an adult's ability to serve in those roles; however, adults are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity with regard to all youth with whom they interact in the course of their community involvement.

Duty to Report

When an employee observes conduct or has knowledge of another employee violating this policy that creates a reasonable suspicion of child abuse (including sexual abuse), or when an employee has reasonable suspicion of an adult harming or endangering a child, the employee shall report the conduct to San Bernardino County's Family and Children's Services in accordance with State law and District Board Policy and Administrative Regulation 5141.4 – Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting.

(cf. 4013 – Complaints Concerning District Personnel)

(cf. 5141.4 – Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting)

Investigation

Whenever the District receives a report concerning a possible boundary violation, the site supervisor and the assigned Human Resources Administrator will conduct a prompt investigation utilizing the procedures for investigations of allegations of serious misconduct. The investigation shall include a review of the full history of concerns relating to the subject of the concern/complaint.

Immediate intervention shall be considered and implemented when necessary to protect student safety and/or the integrity of the investigation.

Disciplinary Action

Any employee who is found to have engaged in conduct in violation of law, this or other Board Policy shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. In the case of a certificated employee, the employee may be subject to a report to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The Superintendent or designee shall notify local law enforcement as appropriate.

(cf. 4113.2 – Suspension/Disciplinary Action)  
(cf. 4117.4 - Dismissal)

An employee who has knowledge of but fails to report inappropriate employee conduct may also be subject to discipline.

A volunteer, student teacher, independent contractor or an employee of an independent contractor who violates this policy may be prohibited from working or serving in District schools and programs for an appropriate period of time or permanently, as determined by the Superintendent or designee.

**Confidentiality and Retaliation**

The District prohibits retaliation against anyone who files a complaint under this policy. Any employee who retaliates against any such complainant, reporter, or other participant in the District's complaint process shall be subject to discipline.

Reporting employees are specifically advised of the following:

1. Reporting employees are neither permitted nor responsible for investigating whether the conduct is inappropriate; and
2. Reporting employees are required to maintain confidentiality.

Confidentiality protects both the student(s) and the adult who is the subject of the report. Failure to maintain confidentiality may impede the investigation and foster untrue and potentially harmful rumors. Nothing in this policy shall prevent any represented employee from consulting with his/her exclusive representative.



# REDLANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## CALL TO ACTION



See something?  
Hear something?  
*Sense something?*

**SAY  
SOMETHING.**

*Together, we can keep our children safe.*

Report suspected child abuse or neglect to:  
CPS 24-Hour Hotline:

**1 (800) 827-8724**

Within 36 hours, mandated reporters are required  
to send a written report (CA State Form 8572)  
[http://ag.ca.gov/childabuse/pdf/ss\\_8572.pdf](http://ag.ca.gov/childabuse/pdf/ss_8572.pdf)  
Via Fax (909) 891-3545 or (909) 891-3560

## BEST SOURCES FOR CREDIBLE DISTRICT INFORMATION



@RedlandsUSD  
#ThisisRUSD

[www.redlandsusd.net](http://www.redlandsusd.net)

School Safety Updates  
[www.cityofredlands.org/police/  
schoolsafetyupdates](http://www.cityofredlands.org/police/schoolsafetyupdates)

